The Gothic Beauties and History of The Canterbury Provincial Buildings

By

C. R. H. Taylor M.A., Dip. Jour.

Librarian, Alexander Turnbull Library

With a Preface by

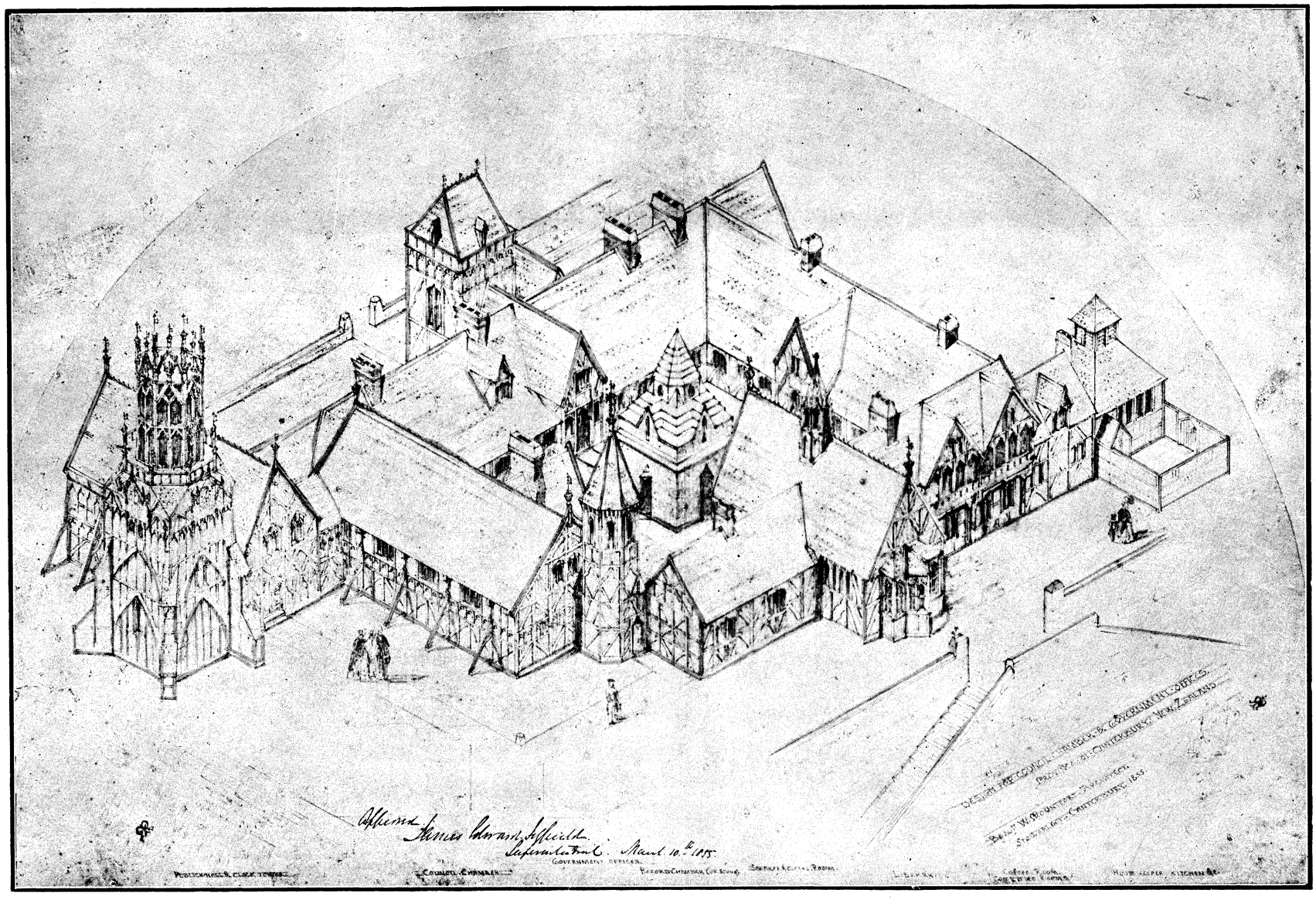
Hon. Sir R. Heaton Rhodes, K.C.V.O., K.B.E., M.L.C.

THIRD EDITION

Christchurch

Canterbury Provincial Buildings Board

1950



The Original Design for the Provincial Council Buildings. The lock Tower appears at left (south) end.

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Preface

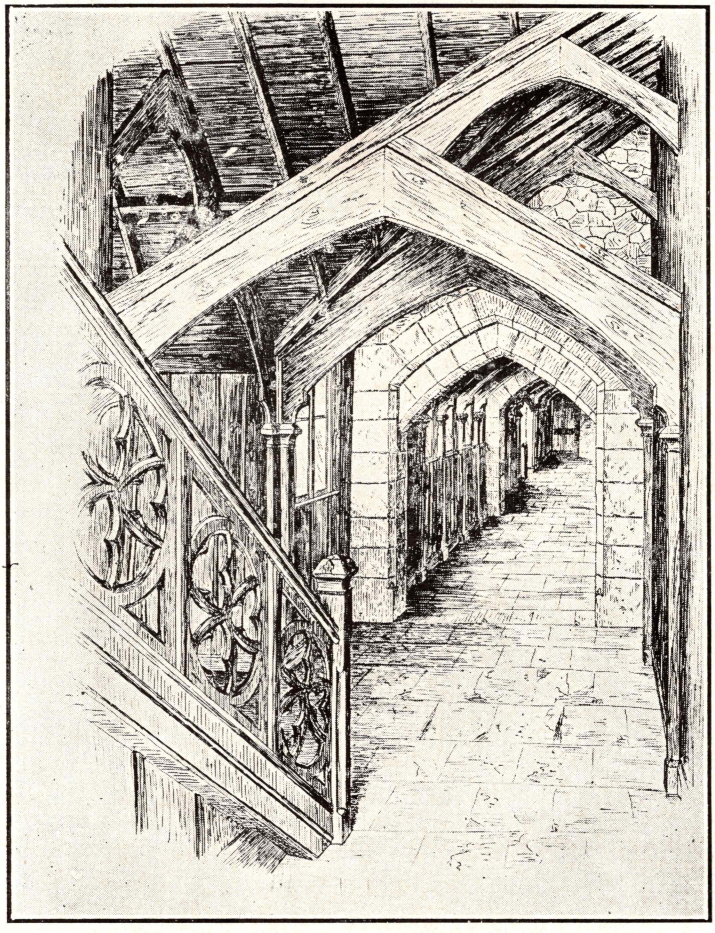
This little booklet, which is at once a history of the Canterbury Provincial Buildings and a description of its Gothic beauties, should be welcomed by all in Canterbury. It certainly will be by lovers of our most beautiful edifice.

From a personal point of view, I welcome it warmly. I have known the old building ever since I can remember my own father sitting in the Provincial Council, and I have a very sincere affection for it. We constantly have visitors from abroad who express their admiring interest in the building, which is indeed a fine example of a type of architecture now rarely used. Yet many dwellers in our city cannot spare the time to examine its interior, and there are too few amongst us who know anything of the detail, the infinite variety, of the work of mason and painter. How many, for instance, could say whom the masks under the corbels represent, or could even tell us that there are therein depicted the features of members of the Royal family, British Prime Ministers and others, like Florence Nightingale.

Canterbury residents should take their children to the Provincial Buildings and point out these objects of interest; and those who do not know it should take this little book with them and study the work so beautifully designed by Mr. Mountfort, and so well executed by the workmen. They will thank the author for bringing them into closer touch with this historic and beautiful edifice.

R. HEATON RHODES.

Parliament Buildings.



From a drawing by Mr. J. G. Collins of the passage traversing the wooden building.

The Gothic Beauties and History of the Canterbury Provincial Buildings

INTRODUCTION.

Of the many visitors who have come to see the old Provincial Buildings, it is probably no exaggeration to say that only a minority carry away with them any more definite recollection, any further image than of dim low-arched, stone-flagged passages, grey stone walls, a hushed and church-like atmosphere wherein one can almost visualise the passing of soft-footed cowled monks as of long past days, and a faint musty odour that savours vaguely of antiquity and historic mystery. Some facts are remembered, others merge in a doubtful maze that one would fain place in fair array. The numberless points of interest defy the attention that is compassed only by the time of a short tour round the old rambling pile. Thus I have thought that in justice to the large number of sight-seers and admirers, no less than to the noble structure itself, to set out the many items of attraction in a brief yet comprehensive form, would be not only a pleasant task, but perhaps, too, some aid to those who would study it with more than a cursory interest.

Although it has been the aim to make the treatment as simple as possible, no important material has been neglected, hence it has been necessary to touch more than superficially upon the two main aspects—the architectural and the historical. A monument of former days, as the building has now become, it is both fascinating and informative to examine purely in that light. It is acknowledged widely to be beautiful, but just where this beauty lies, and wherein it excels, will be of interest to all, particularly to those who may not be well acquainted with Gothic architecture, of which the group and especially the Chamber itself, present a fine example. In adverting to the various portions, therefore, some brief reference is in each

instance made to architectural characteristics, as to both significance and historical setting.

On the historical side, the progress of events round the settlement is followed in so far as it throws light on the building of this edifice. The main political and economic events such as appear to be of interest are also woven into the story and form a background giving some perspective for that part dealing with the actual construction of the State Houses of the little Colony. Of the great men whose memory is still respected at the present day, and whose spirit and works mould the course of these years, due notice is taken where this has helped to make the picture more complete.

Any writer on the past finds himself in debt to earlier students, and the short bibliography here does not fully indicate how I have leaned upon other authorities.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to friends who have given me aid upon different aspects of the work. To Mr. L. R. Poutawera of the Public Works Department, I am grateful for most courteous and useful aid, and the personal interest and encouragement of the late Hon. J. A. McCullough, M.L.C., Chairman of the Provincial Buildings Board, has been very gratifying. Mr. J. G. Collins, architect and artist of Christchurch, graciously placed at my disposal his considerable collection of attractive sketches of the buildings, of the art and accuracy of which no less than of the admiration that produced them I am indeed appreciative. The South Island Travel Association has kindly made avaliable an excellent illustration of the inside doors of the Chamber, and Mr. W. D. Ferguson, of Wellington, who has the distinction of being a grandson of W. S. Moorehouse, by whose hand the foundation stone was laid, has allowed me to photograph for reproduction the trowel used on that occasion. I am in debt to Mr. Johannes C. Andersen, M.B.E., for help in remedying some errors in the earlier edition.

Some points in the descriptive matter are still uncertain, and either information has been acknowledged lacking, or a probable guess hazarded. But no fiction has wittingly been put into the work at any stage. The writer would, for future editions, be grateful for information on matters which in the following pages are lacking in detail.

Perhaps it should be explained that my own interest in the subject arose from my seven years of working in the building when it was occupied by the Lands and Survey Department. The fascination of its passageways and stairs, its narrow windows and economy of structure held me then, but going back now, as I occasionally do, I find the whole spirit of the place as something real and of infinite appeal and charm . . . I think I should like to believe that the building has a soul.

C. R. H. T.

Wellington.
January, 1950.

—F. L. Casbolt.

Looking from the lobby into the Chamber. The mosaic work is well shown.

CHAPTER I

Architecture of the Gothic Style

THE admiration of a fine old building generally involves more than one impression: first a veneration of its age, second the layman's awe of a great skilled work that is rather beyond him, and third, possibly a true sense of beauty in the blending of colours, harmony of form and line or trueness of proportion. This last may never become a realisation by analysis, nor need it be: but it can be satisfying for one to know that in addition to all these elements, the architecture of a Gothic building has something else. It is a medium of expression, it is symbolic of certain ideals, and it has a broad understanding and love of life in its many forms.

Hence if, in the Provincial Council Chamber, a corbel, for instance, is pointed out as being beautiful, and one sees a cluster of leaves in stone, it is not enough to know that it looks well: that it was not a haphazard choice of design or a meaningless group would more readily appeal to the interest. In the structure of Gothic buildings, therefore, we find that every detail has a purpose, and each curve or line is a characteristic or an emblem of its nature, or that of its builders.

Futhermore, although we may look upon such constructions as being primarily ornamental, the opposite was, in the first instance, usually the case. Originally the races of northern Europe, among which the term first seems to have arisen, had need of covering, and this gradually took the most affective form. The Gothic developed into, essentially the towering arch of the forest trees, and it is in its depicting of woodland leaves, slender shafts or boughs, fruits and living wild creatures that much of its character lies.

But use and necessity were the first arbiters of the nature of the building and the beauty of natural forms was invoked for

this purpose. In the early Middle Ages "the Gothic Architecture arose in massy and mountainous strength, axe-hewn and iron-bound, block heaved upon block by the monk's enthusiasm and the soldier's force; and cramped and stanchioned into such weight of grisly wall as might bury the anchoret in darkness, and beat back the utmost storm of battle, suffering but by the same narrow crosslet the passing of the sunbeam or of the arrow. Gradually, as that monkish enthusiasm became more thoughtful, and as the sound of war became more and more intermittent beyond the gates of the convent or the keep, the stony pillar grew slender, and the vaulted roof grew light till they had wreathed themselves into the semblance of the summer woods at their fairest, and of the dead field-flowers, long trodden down in blood, sweet monumental statues were set to bloom for ever beneath the porch of the temple or the canopy of the tomb."*

As, generally speaking, the reference is to English Gothic, this shows the transition from early English of the tenth and eleventh centuries through the Decorated and the Perpendicular styles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to the Debased Gothic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The decline of this ecclesiastical architecture (as Gothic is in the main), came about through several causes. The abolition and destruction of so many monasteries under Henry VIII, added to the diminishing power of the Church, meant a great decadence in architecture. And again, the invention of gunpowder rendered futile the old embattled castles and fortified convents and cathedrals. The demand for might in buildings was passing away together with the feudal days, hence attention was turned to decoration and luxury of embellishment: and it was because this feature was indulged to excess that the style became known as Debased, losing its pride of place, while a rational Decorated style survived to later ages. There are several distinct characteristics of Gothic structure, which become apparent as one examines a fine example such as the Provincial Buildings supply. Although more direct reference will be made at later stages, a brief summary seems in keeping at this point.

Before proceeding, it is well for one to understand the sense of freedom of the Gothic spirit. It is apparent in most of the characteristics to be given; it shows the hand of skilled, but not mechanical craftsmen. In uniform and symmetrical building

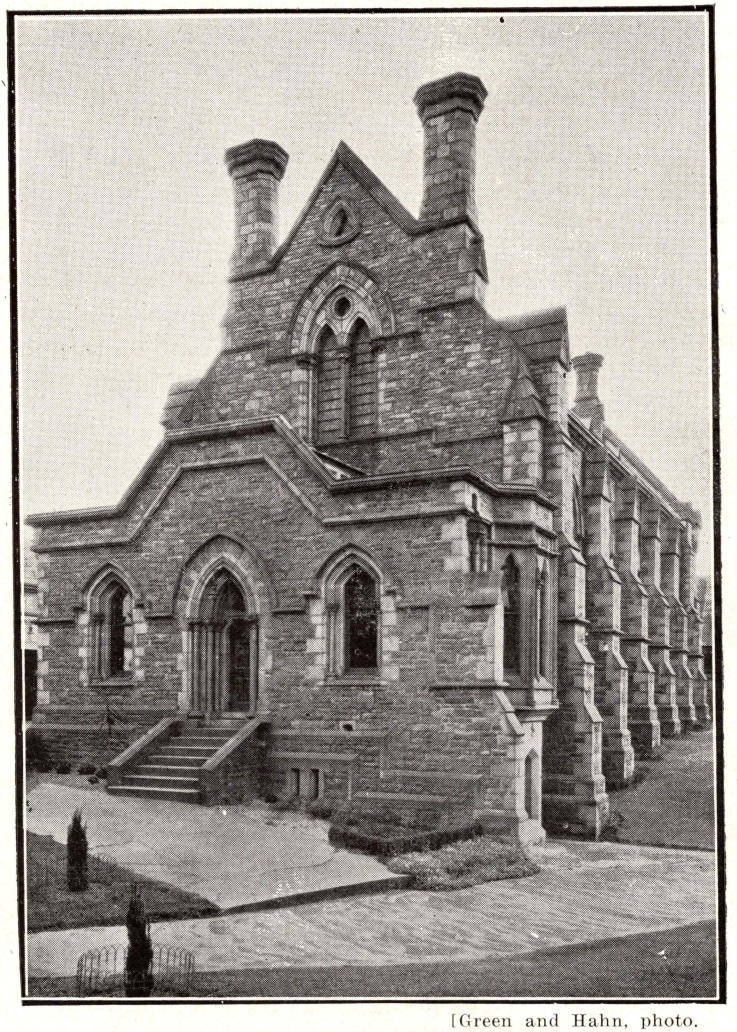
* Ruskin—"The Stones of Venice," ch. VI, Vol. 2.

there is needed only skilled and mechanically accurate masonry without imagination or originality. It is in this that Gothic surpasses Greek or Byzantine architecture. It allows more scope for the designer and the worker—the Christian idea that every man has a soul—and the range of its interest is broadened accordingly. Art in architecture, as in poetry or painting or music, does not say the same thing over and over again. It is ever changing, ever varied, yet enclosed within a form, as poetry is within its ryhthm and its verse, or music within its theme.

In all the following elements of Gothic, this idea may be seen to be basically implicit. There is first, as might be expected from barbaric races, the impression of savage rudeness, reflecting the stern character of the cold north, its hard vigorous peoples and its harsh bitter clime. The love of change is next a marked attribute. Particularly does this suggest freedom, independence, perhaps a spirit of nomadic restlessness that we know was peculiar to their life. An appreciation of nature is knit into the Gothic art, as in the temperament of the races among which it was implanted, and most truly does the builder follow his models: he was free to build as he chose—his examples were ready to hand with little convention to constrict his handiwork to a constant form.

Next is remarkable the rigidity that manifests itself in most Gothic edifices. In this can be conceived a spirit of perseverance—perhaps even obstinacy—that, too, one associates with the older races of England, France and Germany. And lastly the impression that is given by redundance, or the accumulation of adornment, as distinct from a repetition of decoration, is surely that of generosity. A strong, stern art, true to the life of its people, but which shows in its form a warmheartedness that symbolises a like quality in them.

There is one other quality, that of grotesquesness, which appears but little in recent work of the Gothic style; the love of quaint, fanciful, perhaps legendary designs and figures, such as would readily appeal to simple races with a wealth of superstition and folk-lore, was, in the Middle Ages, a very notable factor in building practice. Although this may well be mentioned, there seems to be very little in the Provincial Buildings that can definitely come under this term. The grotesque figures known as gargoyles which appear on some old buildings are examples of this quality.



[Green and Hahn, photo.

Stone portion viewed from the south.

CHAPTER II

The Buildings and their Characteristics

Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,
That crown the watery glade . . . .

—THOMAS GRAY.

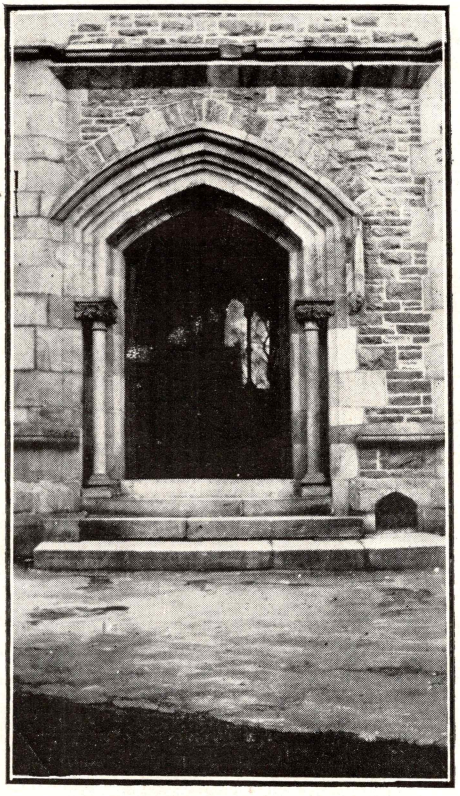
SINCE now we have seen broadly the nature and tendencies of Gothic architecture, we can turn to the buildings themselves and view their traits in the light that the foregoing explanation will shed upon them.

Looking at the stone portion—the Provincial Chamber proper—with its lounge and the old Bellamy's quarters below and to the east—one receives immediately the impression of a sombre magnificence of sturdy strength: a mental picture perhaps of a mighty rock face in the Southern Alps, dark, precipitous and grand in its bulk of eternal granite. The southern entrance in particular is suggestive of this "mountain brotherhood," as is the extreme eastern corner. But over all the stonework, even of the red-tinted towers in the north and west wings, this aspect presses upon us. As far as external form is concerned this is the main interpretation of the stern savage temperament of the northern nations in the old, old days. The mighty buttresses, that, jutting out from depth of wall, to give a full six feet of solid stone, taper in graceful yet powerful columns to take the thrust of the lofty vaulted roof, are another instance of this grim potency. Yet the dark grey mass is relieved beside the tall windows and the deep doorways by a splicing of buff-tinted stone that lightens its expanse and brightens the shafts of light that pour in many-coloured flood through the rich-dyed panes. These deep doorways, too, were made for more than the repository of redundant arches and columns, for their retreat is safe from the wind-lashed rain, or, in the midst of winter, the swirling sleet and driving hail. Above

each arch and window, following the length of the building, is a shapely, yet cunningly contrived dripstone to lead away the coursing raindrops.

Now we have to explore a wider field in order to appreciate the changefulness of the Gothic spirit in its structures. In the Chamber itself there are many examples to explore.

The love of change indicates a free will, and as this epitomises the Gothic soul, so does it symbolise the spirit of the early pioneers of Canterbury who were the builders. It is interesting first to see how the old cathedral architecture has been adapted to a new order.



Deep set doorway, on the east side.

The traversing screen, a characteristic of the Cistercian structures of the 13th century, is prominent to one's view, and for a moment one wonders where such a design had been seen before. Yes, in the cathedral itself: beyond the transept and on either side of the choir—pillar after pillar and arch upon arch in white arcades of stone. Here in the Chamber the architect has cleverly used the style to support the people's gallery. Yet how appropriate, that the Trinity should not be far from the affairs of

public weal, for its three parts so clearly marked by arcades and arched doorway signify the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, just as the graceful soaring arches speak of the aspiration of Christian ideals.

There is, too, something of the following poetic description of a Gothic Cathedral to be found here:

The tall shafts that mount in massy pride,
Their mingling branches shoot from side to side
Where elfin sculptors with fantastic clue
O'er the long roof their wild embroidery drew.

That the Gothic structure can conform to the needs of a hall so little like unto a church speaks much for its versatility. Shorn of its transept and choir, needing neither flying buttress nor lofty clerestory, yet in its simplicity it has enclosed beauties to suit its form, and lacks little to the perfection thereof. The superstructure of the southern portal has taken as its model, though enriched by a series of stately steps, the main entry to the cathedral in the city. In the main the outlines have much in common.

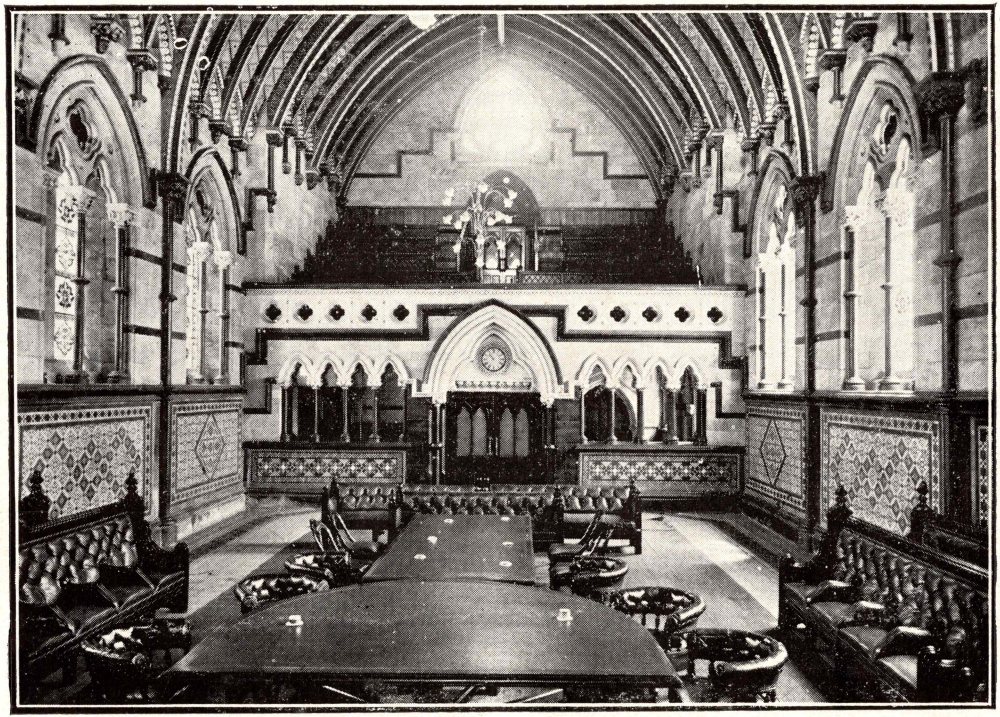
Still, we must turn to other examples of the Gothic love of change. From the tall windows comes our light: here, too, the architect has placed a tribute to the cathedral's form, and found space for a screen in each of the window recesses beneath their broad arches. Alternately he has placed text-laden lights and floral designs. One might, perhaps, recall in them an age

When superstition, with capricious hand
In many a maze, the wreathèd window planned,
With hues romantic tinged the gorgeous pane,
To fill with holy light the wondrous fane,

and the effect truly appears that

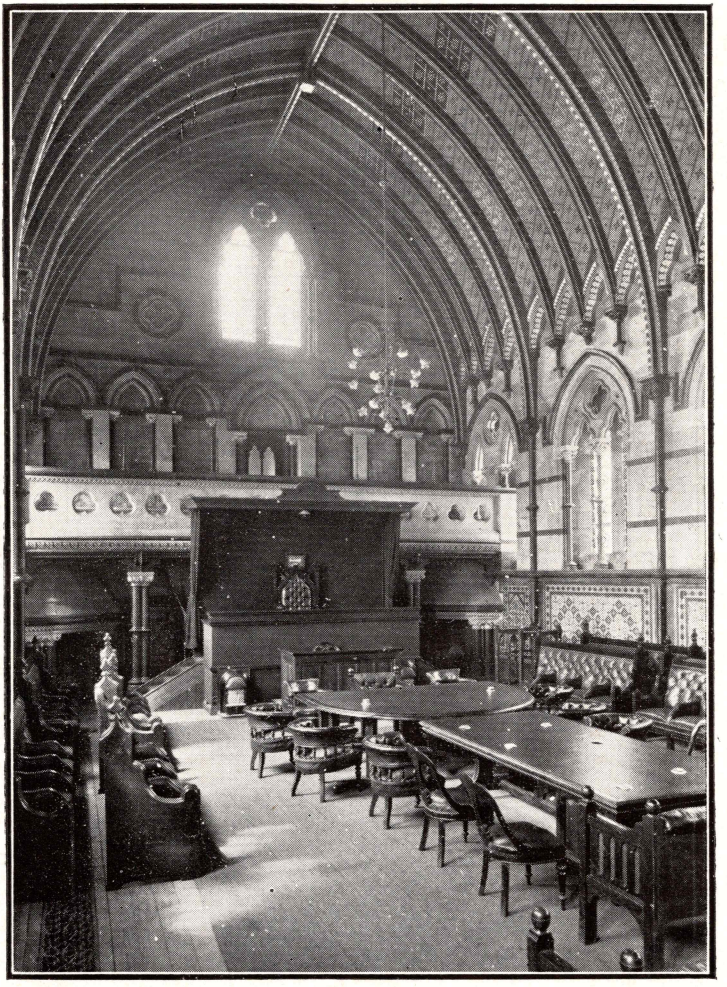
The deep-set windows, stained and traced,
Would seem slow-flaming crimson fires.

The sayings and texts, drawn from many sources, are a splendid array of precepts for such a meeting house as this



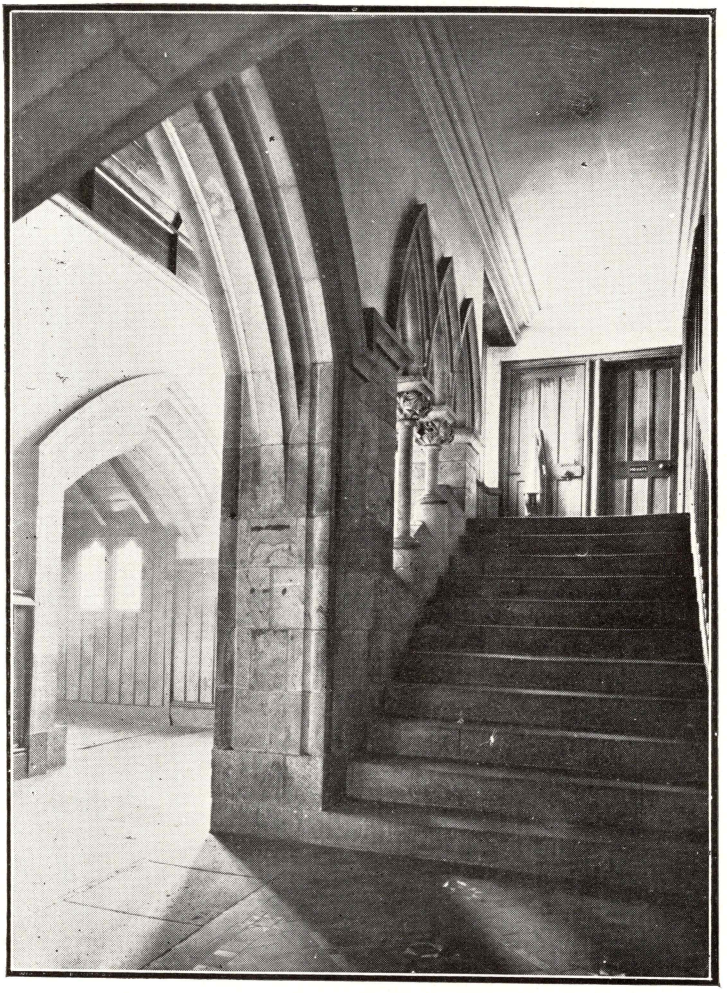
[Green and Hahn, photo.

Interior view of Council Chamber, north end.



[Green and Hahn, photo.

Interior view of Chamber, south end, showing the Press Gallery.



[Green and Hahn, photo.

The stairway leading to Bellamy's

where the affairs of an evolving community were planned. A list of these mottoes follows:—

Good sense and reason ought to be the umpire of all rules.

The credit that is got by a lie only lasts till the truth comes out.

Read another man's conscience, but get thine own by heart.

Opinion is the great pillar that upholds the commonwealth.

By other's faults wise men correct their own.

By speech wisdom shall be known, and learning by the word of the tongue.

Be steadfast in thine understanding and let thy words be the same.

Anger may glance into the heart of a wise man, but rests only in the bosom of fools.

Refrain not to speak when there is occasion to do good.

Censure is the tax a man pays to the public for being eminent.—Swift.

In the hand of God is the prosperity of man.

All wisdom cometh from the Lord and is with Him forever.

Pitch upon that course of life which is most excellent and habit will render it most delightful.

The heart of the prudent will understand and an attentive ear is the desire of a wise man.

Whatsoever thou takest in hand remember the end and thou shalt never do amiss.

Party is the madness of many for the gain of the few.—Pope.

Through the prudence of them which are in authority the city shall be inhabited.

Be not a hypocrite in the sight of men, and talk good when thou speakest.

How great is he that findeth wisdom, yet there is none above him that feareth the Lord.

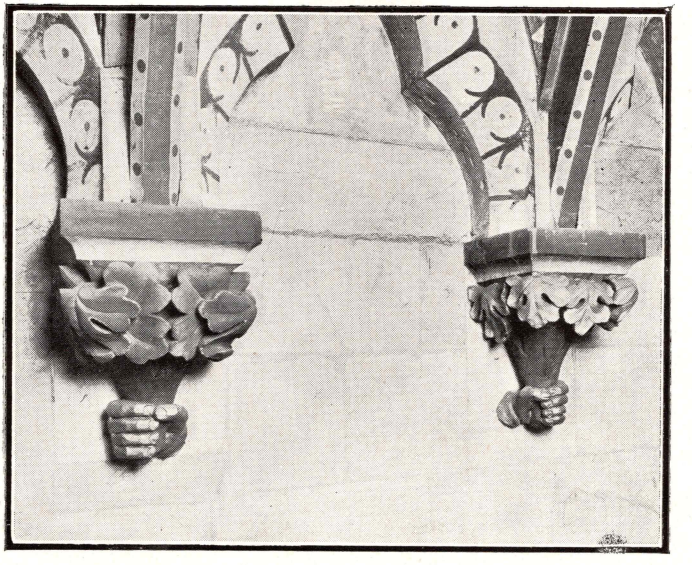
Better is he that hideth his folly than a man that hideth his wisdom.

A wise man in his words maketh himself beloved.

Weigh thy words in a balance lest thou fall before him that lieth in wait.

Four window arches on each side has the architect made similar, but at the far end, just to surprise us, there is above the gallery of the "Fourth Estate," compassed within the big arch, two lancet arches, narrow and sharp, parted by a heavier bulk of stone, and this time with two dark lithe pillars instead of one. The other screens have trefoil arches, which, surmounted by the Greek crosses, weave a delicate tracery that is framed in striking prominence by the dark stone shafts below, and the sombre curving string-course above.

Now aloft behind the press gallery is a series of arches—a screen, as it were, set within the wall. A replica, in detail, of



[Green and Hahn, photo.

The left corbel shows the hand of the worker, and the right that of the scholar. (See p.24.)

the other, it seems at first glance; but no: its arches are simple equilaterals, not trefoils. It has string-courses of dark stone to shade each point, and there are only three on each side, not four as in the proper screen below. Yet what an illusion of number the black separating stone endows!

Nearly all the pillars seem to be black, and nearly all crowned by white stone capitals. Where lighting effects have been studied, the white stone has been used, but where is has mattered little, as in the main supports to the principals that curve away up to the ceiling's crest, a many-coloured floriated cluster has formed its head. Here indeed has the mason shown his wealth of ideas, for scarce two capitals do we find alike. One would think the old-time worker had lost his pattern each time he fashioned a stone anew. So too it is with the corbels* that withstand the thrust of the small intermediate ribs and

*Latin corbis—a basket.

principals, but these latter are all decked in their natural colours as a rule, or resplendent in gold.

Some are most simple in character—perhaps but three curling tendrils—or on the other hand most intricate, with close clusters of fruits, flowers or leaves, birds or beasts. All the better known tree-leaves are there, forever preserved in stone—oak, rose, ivy, hazel, fern and olive.

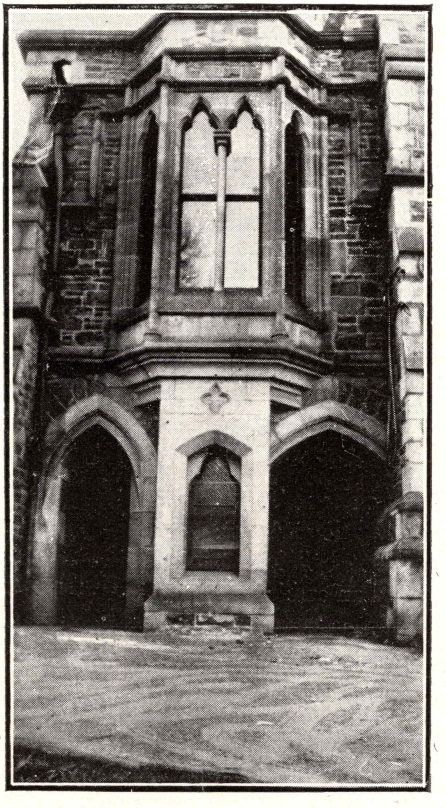
To describe each capital and corbel is an impossible task, and the visitor will delight in exploring their intricacies himself, but there are points that one might wish to remember, and some mention of them is well deserved. Of the capitals within the chamber in plain white stone, the leafy sprays are varied in the middle of the last window-screens before the fireplace. In the one to the east is a bird, and opposite it is a pair of stern-visaged lions' heads.

[Green and Hahn, photo.

Corbel depicting W. Brassington, the stonemason.

Beneath the press gallery, notable, like the screen front, for its dainty frieze, stands a series of handsome larger capitals, in the most easterly of which is a carving of St. Quentin, the artist of the wondrous canopy of ceiling.† But the insistence upon variety, and its fulfilment in so many blooming clusters, is a perpetual source of delight and expectancy.

Another very remarkable series of capitals is set above the columns on the stairway‡ landing leading to the lounge and Bellamy's. The little bat here is most life-like, and the bear pushing through the foliage will surely be out soon! Full of signs, however, is the carving of the dove with her bough of olive. It may be the envoy of peace; but one remembers in Genesis that the dove could find no home upon the waste of waters and returned to the ark—"Lo in her mouth was an olive branch, plucked off." This seems to typify the roving, restless nomadic spirit of the old Northmen,

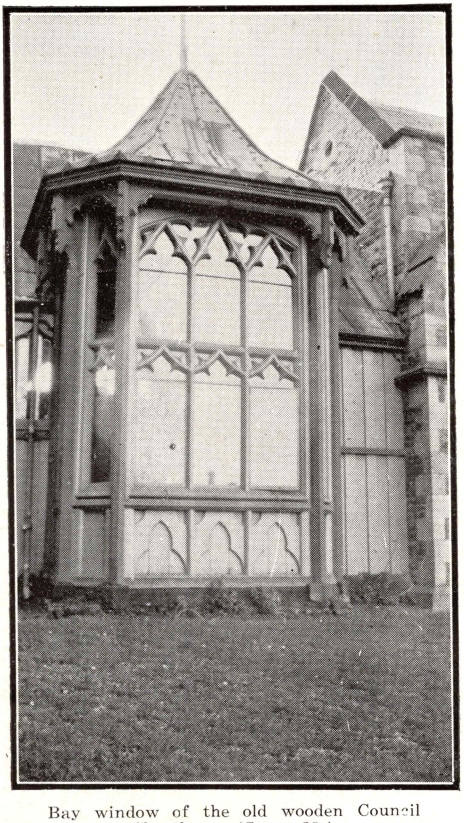


Oriel window in extreme south eastern corner. Left door is from passage-way within. (See p.26.)

† See also Ch. III. ‡ See p.18.

strong and free but answering the call to arms, to sea, and to lands anew.

The denizens of a loftier and richer realm are the splendid corbels above. Rich in their colour, yet richer in their significance they are, for in them are shown perhaps the highest flights of the free, brilliant Gothic fancy. Their hues —green, blue and red, set beside the duller stone—would portray the seasons in their living likeness: and fruits and flowers abound, with her and there a little budding ball-flower, so odd an emblem of Gothic—a mark of the craft as it were.

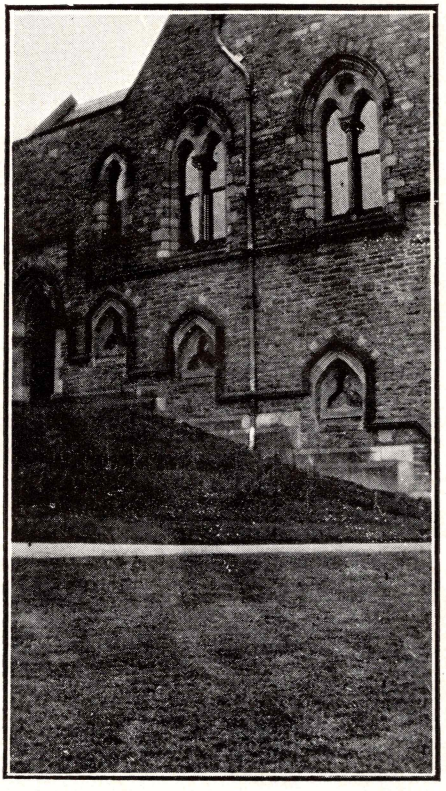


Bay window of the old wooden Council Chamber. (See p.28.)

A love of nature is here too: the very animals creep down amid the leaves,* the falcon preens her plumes, the frog lurks beneath the leafy shade on the hearthside capital, and the child at play soars among the verdure, on his swing. But the mason remembers that neither his skill nor the architect's genius alone could compass the achievement, and by the public gallery he has shown the likeness of his strong heavy hand grasping the corbel's shaft, beside the delicately-wrought, finely-shaped hand of the scholar and thinker‡. Yet he would have you know that the

* See those of the window in the Southern Wall, especially. ‡ See p.21.

mason was himself a man even as others, however skilled he be, and in deferential pride his figure as he was wont to labour, from the rearmost corbel looks for evermore upon the walls in whose shade he wrought so well and long. William Brassington in his life was just as his sculptured statue shows him — an earnest, simple but able craftsman. It is depicted at p.22.



Portion of the south-eastern wall. (See p.28.)

Again, the mason and the architect reflected that there were greater men and women than they, and in respect and loyalty the masks below the corbels' glory are of many a famous character of the last century. On the eastern wall looking south are:

1* 2 3 *4, Queen Victoria. 5, Prince Albert Edward. 6, Florence Nightingale.* Opposing them, again looking south are: 1, *George Canning, Prime Minister of England in 1827. 2, William I, Emperor of Germany from 1861. 3, 4, General Gordon, the hero of Khartoum. 5, David Livingstone, the famed exploror. 6, Lord Salisbury, the illustrious statesman.*

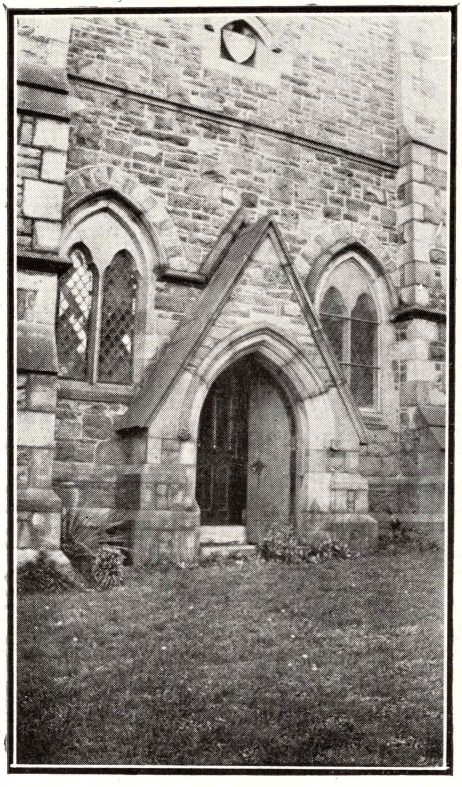
In former ages the use of masks had generally been in the

* Masks 1, 2, 3 East and 3 West are not yet identified. It has been hinted that the stonemason whimsically included effigies of his intimate acquaintance.

nature of grotesque or fanciful ornament, but the more recent trend of the reinstated Gothic was in this new direction, and was evident in many constructions of last century.

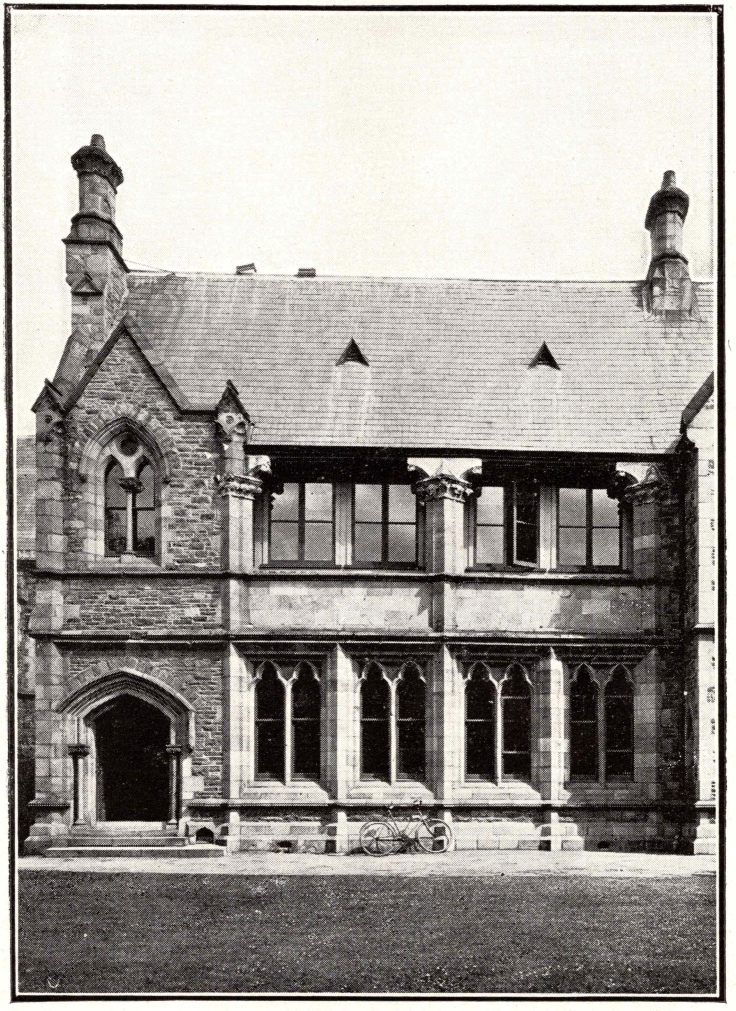
It is, however, only when the building is examined as a whole that one can appreciate the many elements of variety that make up the theme of change and freedom. Generally speaking it is mainly to windows and doors that we turn for relief from the grey face of wall, and windows show a remarkable wealth of ideas here.

The Superintendent's Walk (the path from the southern gateway) commands a view of much of the south and east sides. On either side of the main south door is a window with a simple broad arch, different from the equilateral, the lancet or the trefoil, yet effective in itself. Below on the right of the steps are two narrow crosslets, admitting light to the strait and winding passage from the interior above.

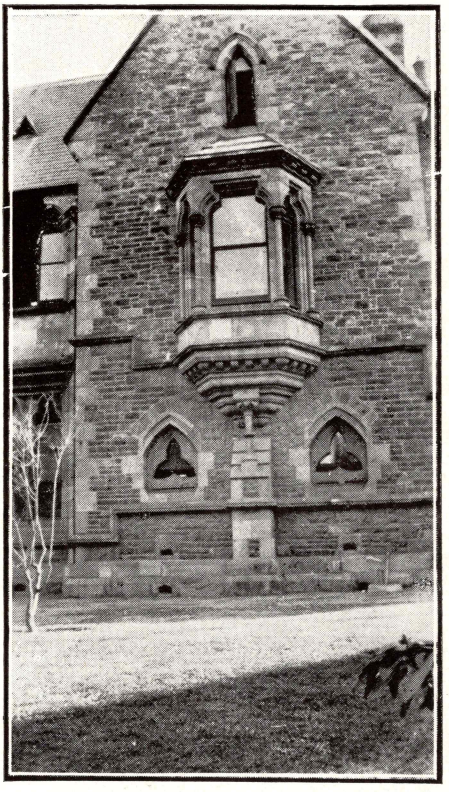


Little gabled doorway opening from the Lobby.

The eastern face at the corner presents a charming diversity. Of the arches one is broad, one narrow, one (the lower window) short and squat, and overhanging all is the oriel bay browed by its little trefoil tops, shown at p.23.



Bellamy's (below) and the Lounge (above) on the eastern side.



Oriel window in the eastern wing.

Now yonder in the other wall is a section of wooden structure*. This window bay with its profuse tracery, many panes and its quaint roof, forms a picture that has almost an Elizabethan air. Adown the slope which the wall takes in three great steps‡ of moulding, three big broad arches in cascade enshrine each a trefoil which in turn clasps painted lights in its frame. Here, too, another door with its green ribbed strength of wood, stands deep within its shapely hood of stone. But yon gabled portal—which one is tempted to call a funny little one—leads to the lobby, and despite its uncouth iron guard, what an odd old-world corner it makes. It is depicted at p.26.

Passing on to a view of the lounge balcony, with its heavy coping, its solid pillars and its weight of stonework, we see below quite a contrast in the windows with slender trefoil arches, sculptured in relief within the deep stone. Further on another oriel window, of yet a new type built as a great buttress, looks o'er the Avon's waters from its array of windows enclosed by cleft aches, of a variety that appears nowhere else about the structure. This is shown above.

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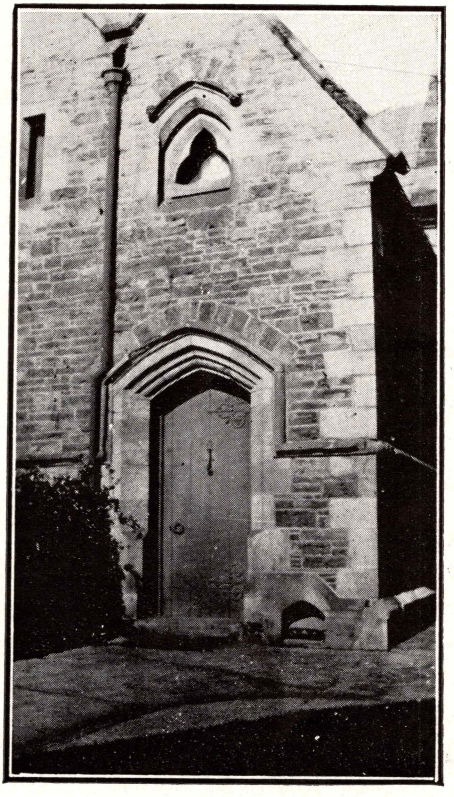
* Shown at p.24. ‡ Shown at p.25

Within the courtyard one is attracted first to the little doorway beside the ivy-clad wall; a pretty spot in the sunny afternoons; but here also the crumbling of ages has shown its hand. It has seemed more common to find the dripstones above such windows as surmount this door, terminating in floral designs, but on this one are two shapely masks, and though one is wasted with the years it is still discernible as that of a bearded man, while the other still portrays unmarred a comely woman's features. The windows on these two walls present a fine diversity in size, though little in shape: most are in simple glass, but the two within the angle are of luxurious stained crystal that filters the sunshine in many lights over the tiled floor within.

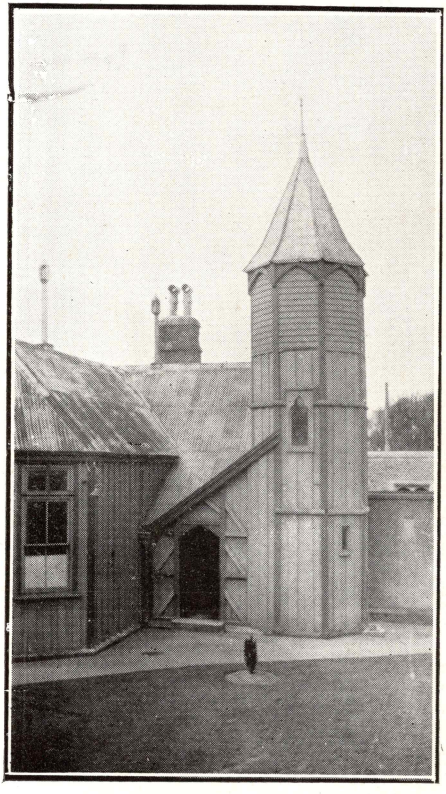


Doorway beside the ivy wall in Quadrangle.

These windows, too, are similar to those of the western façade, whose cascade formation is most splendid where they rise beside the lofty arch of the main entrance. The work embraced by this bower of stone is quite intricate, with its mesh of smaller arches, columns and splendid capitals.

Across the quadrangle there are four towers. A small wooden one, octagonal in form, modelled after the old Norman

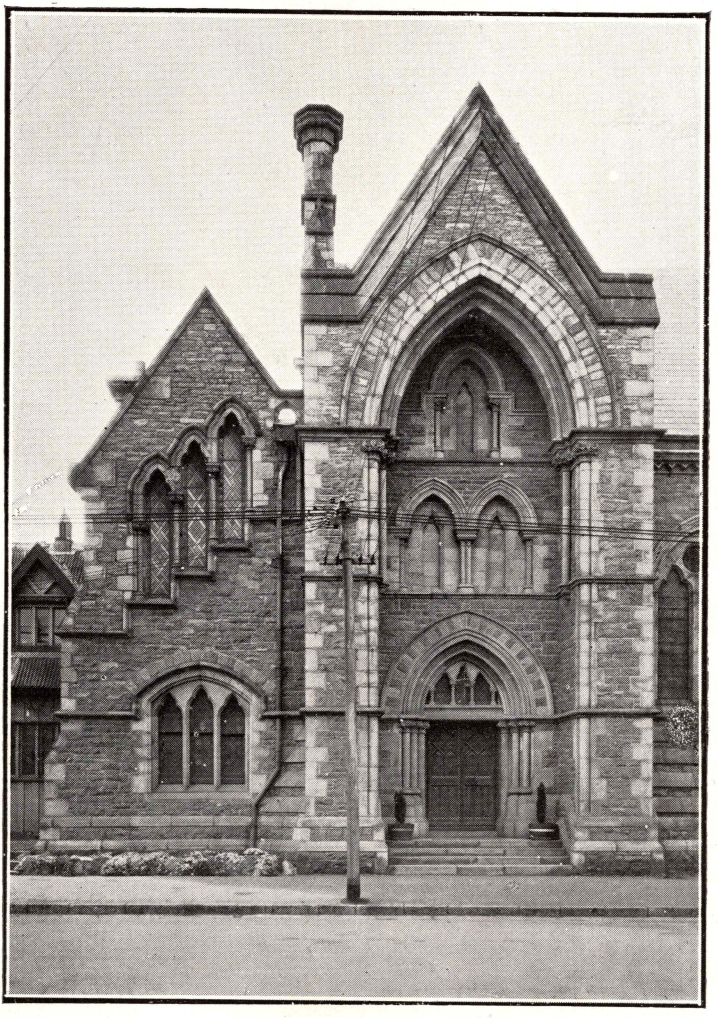
style, with shuttered panelling and narrow crosslet windows, lies to the east. To the north is the tower on Armagh Street, lofty and stout, square and reddish in its stone. It reminds one of the old castle keeps of feudal days, with its tall crosslet windows, some arched in trefoil which pass scanty shafts of light to the little many-cornered rooms within. The smaller stone tower facing west is simpler in outline, and though of similar stone and general aspect, its minor characteristics are comparable with the former style, but not in profusion of ornament.



View of the eastern tower in Quadrangle.

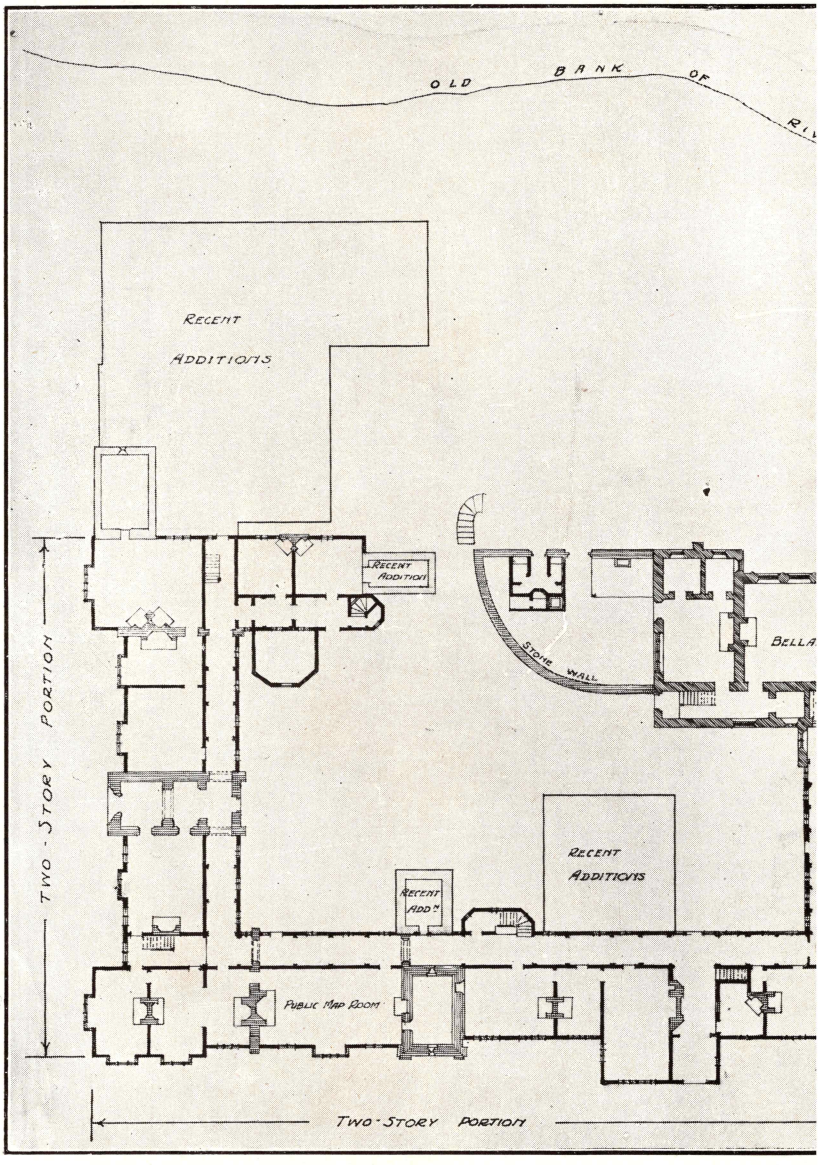
It seems best to leave the further detail of Gothic variety to be sought out by the visitor: so far he will have learned what to seek, and the rest will be his own pleasure.

To complete the tale of Gothic characteristics, the qualities of naturalism, rigidity and redundance might now well be pointed out in the light of the preceding pages. Naturalism has been probably sufficiently indicated for one to appreciate its dominance; but rigidity may need some amplification. The form associates itself with the idea of frozen sharpness of outline, as one would picture in the grassy stalks standing above the snow, or the dead twigs peeping out from the ice-

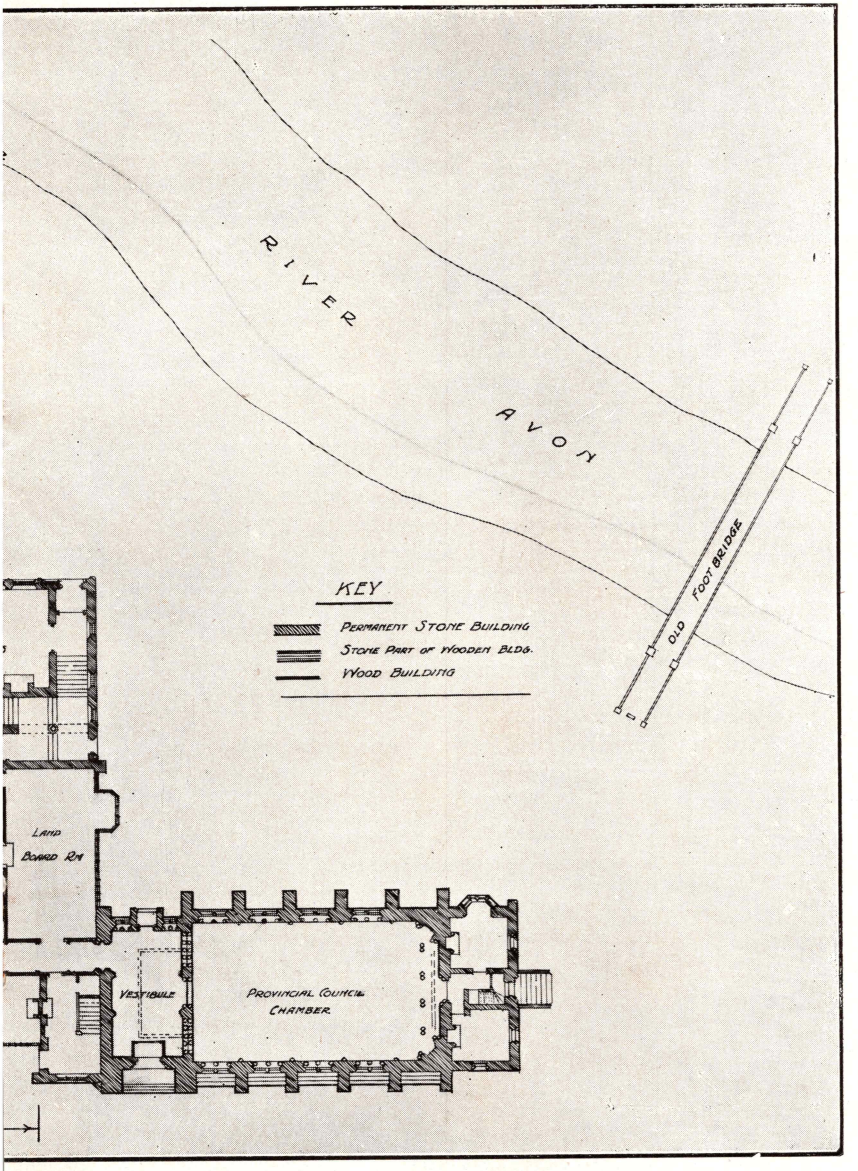


[Green and Hahn, photo.

Main entry to stone Council Chamber, showing the magnificent arch.



Present Day Plan of I



ovincial Council Buildings.

bound woodland brook. The bareness and naked strength of nature's winter aspect has appealed to the Gothic builder; he has taken some strange pleasure "in dwelling upon the crabbed, perverse and morose animation of plants that have known little kindness from earth or heaven, but season after season, have had their best efforts palsied by frost, their brightest buds buried under snow, and their goodliest limbs lopped by tempest."*

But where Greek and Egyptian buildings stand passively with one stone piled upon another, the Gothic has force and energy in its outline. There is power in the buttressed walls to take the mighty thrust of the roofing, and the stonework "stands out in prickly independence, freezing into pinnacles, here starting up into a figure, there germinating into a blossom: anon knitting itself into a branch, alternately thorny, bossy and bristly, or writhed into every form of nervous entanglement, but even when most graceful, never for an instant languid."†

Many points illustrative of these features occur in both the stone and the wooden buildings. The quaint terminals on the roofs, recently removed, were particularly good examples on the wooden portion, although enough yet remains to make manifest the character. Outside this building, possibly the best instance of this rigidity is to be seen in the crockets that adorn the stonework of the entrance to the School of Art, Canterbury College.

The attribute of redundance, or the accumulation of ornament, is apparent in itself, and will need little qualifying. The wealth of adornment both within and without is earnest of the generous temperament of the kindly, strong northern races, and this one can visualise as well as the former characteristic.

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* Ruskin—"The Stones of Venice."

† Ibid.

CHAPTER III

The Encaustic Mosaic Work — The Painted Ceiling — The Inlaid Doors, etc. — The Source of Stone

Below was all mosaic, choicely planned,
With cycles of the human tale.

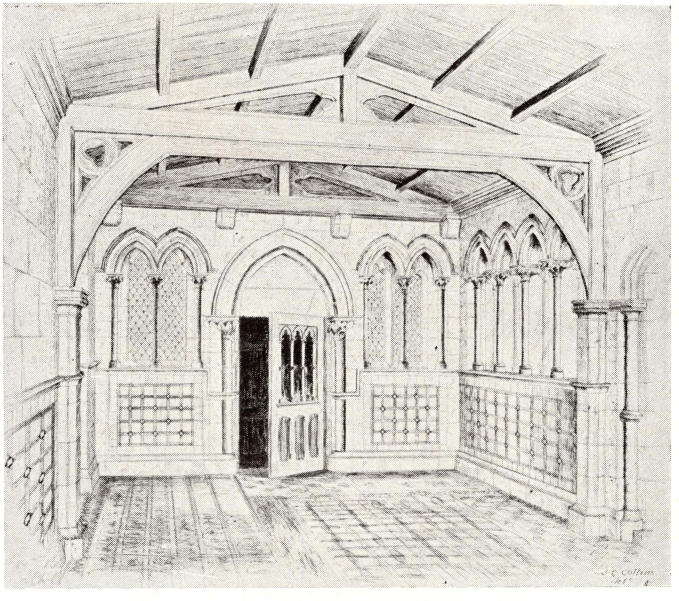
—WRITTEN OF ST. CLEMENT'S, ROME.

DESPITE the fact that the architecture of the buildings as a whole is pure Gothic, yet the ornamental work of the floors, walls and ceiling arises from sources quite foreign and non-European, yet even more ancient and perhaps as wonderful. The art of mosaic* and emblematic decoration originated in the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Assyria, Phœnicia and India.

The circumstances through which mosaic and painted decoration have become incorporated into Gothic may be traced back to two main causes. The Crusades of the thirteenth century commenced the innovation just as they affected the language, the fashions, and the learning of Europe with ideas from the East. From this source also springs the practice of incorporating miniature shields in the stonework of walls, as one sees in several parts of this building. Again in the sixteenth century, the Renaissance was still more influential in leading across Europe this style of ornament, which had become popular in Italy and the Mediterranean countries generally.

While the symbols, such as appear in the chamber, are simple in themselves, yet justly to understand their true significance one must appreciate the outlook of the pagan with his elemental religious beliefs, in other and far different days. For most mosaic

* Mosaic—from Latin Musiacus—of the Muses.



A sketch by Mr. J. G. Collins of the lobby outside the stone Chamber. Notice the fine timbered effects.

takes its form from religion, and the modern era finds in it mainly a pleasing array of quaint emblems, rather inscrutable in themselves, yet yielding quite a wide field of speculation for the investigator. This is shortly what one finds:—

Untold ages before writing was the medium of thought from one period to another men attempted to express their ideas in visible form. The rude savage, scarce able on his fingers to count beyond ten, with little idea of abstract number, still less of things, whose habits were of the earth alone, could form little concept of a spiritual and eternal God. Hence the imagination of men, brooding over the idea of the Unseen and the Infinite, was bounded by things of their daily life, such as most moved their passions, hopes or fears. They could not convey such religious feelings as they had without visible symbols to assist their conceptions, and emblems were rather crutches for the halt than wings that the strong might soar. Man clung to the visible and tangible: the Israelites preferred a calf of gold to the Jehovah whom they could worship in spirit alone.

Of all material things, what might well appeal most to man? What in all ages has man most desired and longed for? Some main idea must thread all his symbolism in answer to this appeal. Surely it is LIFE. "All that a man hath will he give for his life," the book of Job tells us. "Give me back my youth and I will give you all I possess," Voltaire beseeched his physician.

'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
O life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want,

prayed Tennyson in "The Two Voices."

It was for this that the old-time alchemists toiled, not to advance chemistry but to discover the Elixir of Life. But what nature refused to science, the gods, it was believed, would surely bestow on the pious!—"*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*"

A tree of life stood in the midst of Paradise, and in the second Paradise promised in Revelations, a tree shall stand once more "for the healing of the nations." In the wondrous theology of ancient Egypt, Isis promised long life to her votaries. The religion of India bids its devotees partake of the Amrita Cup of immortality when they win to the other plane. Even for the Buddhist, his creed holds out the haven of eternal calm, and life evermore in the realms of Nirvana.

Now, little wonder if, with this desire so implanted in his soul, the religionist should cast in his mosaic plans the emblem of life, its source and its nature. The birth of a being was a never-ceasing miracle, and as a fact incomprehensible, a token of the greatness of a higher Being, to be worshipped as such, in whatever form of idol He might be represented. Hence the idea of creation epitomised the pagan's creed, and the mystic symbols used so often represent but the two sexes. This depicting of masculinity and femininity seems to have been regarded by most ancient peoples, though with all candour, as something pure and sacred.

But despite the fact that meanings are attached to most mosaic ornament, those of geometric designs were primarily employed purely as ornament, because the interweaving and arrangement of lines, squares, circles and triangles formed an

attractive pattern in many works of art. When true symbols became incorporated in these geometric settings, a meaning was given to them too. Hence the triangle apex upmost represents man or fire, and with the apex downwards, woman or water. Again the circle, as the "unit," represents woman, and the square in its firmness indicates man. Where these adjoin or interweave, there is implied the idea of creation.

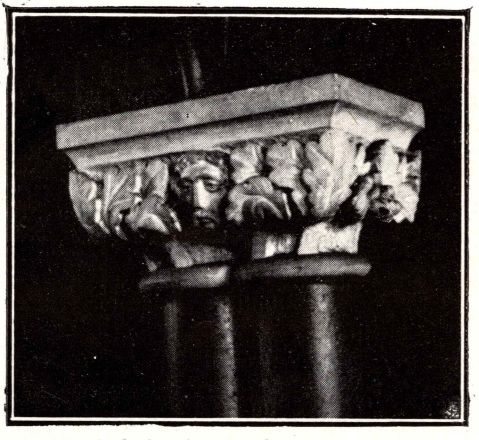
Of the true symbols—which in this building are very few—the most striking is the diaper-work figure appearing like three leaves of which the two outer ones are curled back, similar in shape to a fleur-de-lys. All these leaf-like forms are clasped by a ring viewed from the side. The three elements represent both the Trinity and the masculine nature, while the ring is again the "unit" and the feminine. This same symbol occurs elsewhere very frequently in slightly varying forms. In the floor tiling leading to Bellamy's and the Lounge the very same type is still clear, though a little worn. The rosette or eastern daisy again suggests the same theme. The centre is round—the feminine sign, and each petal radiating from it is the masculine counterpart..

Further examples of the same emblems are found in the splendid painted ceiling above. On looking into it one can readily believe that the painter took some two years to accomplish the work. Perhaps it were not out of place to say, in passing, something of the Sydney artist, J. C. St. Quentin, whose work it was, although the design was from the master mind of Mountfort, the architect.

A tall, good-looking man was St. Quentin, of rather striking appearance, and whom one would judge a gentleman at sight. Though rumour has it that his best day's work was done when he was well warmed with brandy, yet this is scarcely quite true. Still, the spirit seemed to bestir his smouldering genius, and was a necessity to his strange nature (for such it surely was). His was the genius of execution, and the knowledge of colours that have survived without trace of decay the span of years till now.

The first emblem to strike the eye will be the lotus or eastern lily. It is to be seen along the sides of the principals, depicted in gold. The same significance is attached to this too—mascu-

linity, as the basis of creation. There is something, too, of the love of nature in so using a flower as a form of decoration. The lotus is viewed from the side so that its fourth petal is out of sight, hence the odd appearance. The lozenge or diamond-shaped emblems are purely feminine in their significance.



Capital showing St. Quentin's Mask.

Between the smallest ribs along the walls are little trefoil arches, the sloping edges of which bear quaint figures as of a circle with a cross-bar joined below. Again can be discerned the two emblems — the feminine unit, and the masculine trinity. In a subtle way this is incorporated with the lotus once more, depending upon whether one views the white or the red portion. Each has the same significance—the red three-pointed trident is distinctly the masculine force again—and its dual interpretation adds to its mystic character.

The remaining symbols are less important, and may be readily guessed at, but it may now be seen that the main theme implicit in these works has been that of creation. The entirety of this encaustic mosaic was planned by Mountfort and made in England to be sent out to Christchurch in pieces ready for assembling.

Although the visitor would scarcely pass them by, it were well to mention the splendid work in the doors of the buildings. All are massive and heavy, yet not unduly ponderous. The external ones were obviously built to withstand the vicissitudes of the weather, but in the inner ones some delicacy has been given play. The two main doors of the Council Chamber and that of the Superintendent's room behind, are splendid examples

of the old cabinetmaker's art, with their inlaid work of handsome New Zealand woods. The craftsman in this case was Diethier, whose place of business in those days used to be in Armagh Street.

The brazen door-pulls, together with all the other metal fittings such as floor grating and pillar collars, were wrought in England to the specifications provided by Mountfort, and accurately did he gauge his needs. These gratings cover the great ducts that carried the water for heating the Chamber. The boiler is situated below the Superintendent's room, and when, a few years ago, the system was called into use, despite its long period of inactivity the work of the old-time plumbers stood up staunchly to the work for the many months it was needed.

The observer may enquire whence the need for both heating system and great fireplaces. Originally these latter were ventilating shafts, before the present wall of bricks was put in to throw the heat out more. The system of ventilation was very complete. Apart from the chimneys at the south end, a great boxing runs the entire length of the Chamber along the crest of the ceiling. This carries a current of air, fed from shafts hidden in the window screens, up to the false chimney at the northern extremity. To ensure the maximum draught through this, a large gas ring can send a great flood of hot air upward, drawing that from the upper parts of the Chamber with it.

Electric light was installed only as recently as 1919, and it is here worth mentioning that some criticism was levelled in 1865 at the decision to use kerosene lamps rather than the newly available but very popular gas.

Before leaving this chapter, which is clearing up several minor matters for us, we must say something of the source and nature of the stone employed in the building.

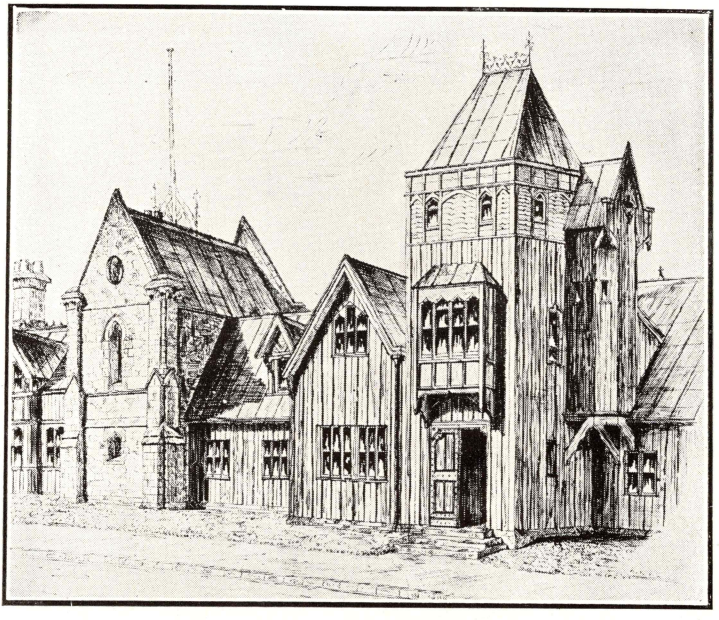
Portland cement as we know it today was not yet in wide use, and the binding mortar used throughout was hydraulic lime, varying in nature according to its purpose. On the outside, the main dark stone of the walls, which when new had a light

blue shade, was a lava trachyte from the Halswell Quarries owned by W. G. Brittan. This dark mass is relieved by a warm straw-tinted sandstone hewn from the pits at Governor's Bay. Where more strength and durability were needed as in the quoins, gables and pillars, the trachyte porphyry from Ellis's Quarry at Hoon Bay was employed. This appears too in the string courses, the coping and the dripstones, forming in many parts a sharp contrast with the lighter material. The very dark pillars, lintels and so on were achieved by oiling the porphyry and polishing. All the round pillars were turned out by lathe work from the rough-hewn stone.

The walls inside are lined mainly with ashlar from Governor's Bay, but a still lighter stone was hauled from the Weka Pass. This meant a haulage of some fifty miles, across four good-sized rivers, over routes that were little more than tracks, and the conveyances were limited to bullock wagons. But that fine white stone that appears to such effect in the screen, and from which all the capitals and corbels were fashioned, was truly worth the labour of obtaining it. While its ease of working is an advantage for internal work, its susceptibility to deterioration under exposure to the elements is against its use as outside ornament. Where this has been done, the decay is already marked, as on the western tower amid the wooden buildings. The stone of a reddish tinge that comprises the northern and western towers is said to come from Rapaki, though one might guess from its hue that it is from the walls of Redcliffs.

The amount of stone required in the building appears considerable when one estimates its size. The Council Chamber is seventy-three feet long, thirty-one feet broad and to the ceiling's crest is forty feet in height. The walls are five feet six inches thick at the base and taper to two feet nine inches at twenty-five feet above the ground. In sinking foundations for this pile, it is therefore no wonder that it was necessary to penetrate to the shingle beds below in order to secure a firm base.

Finally we may turn to the woodwork. The main wood in the building is in the principals supporting the slate roof. These are of kauri throughout, and are said to be as sound today as



Durham Street view of wooden building from a sketch by Mr. J. G. Collins.

ever, although subsidiary timberwork was in rimu and lighter woods, much of which has rotted or admitted the borer. In the wooden portion the same is broadly true, but the proportion of good timber is large and decay is noticeable only here and there. But though some renovations have been made, others are becoming increasingly necessary.

CHAPTER IV.

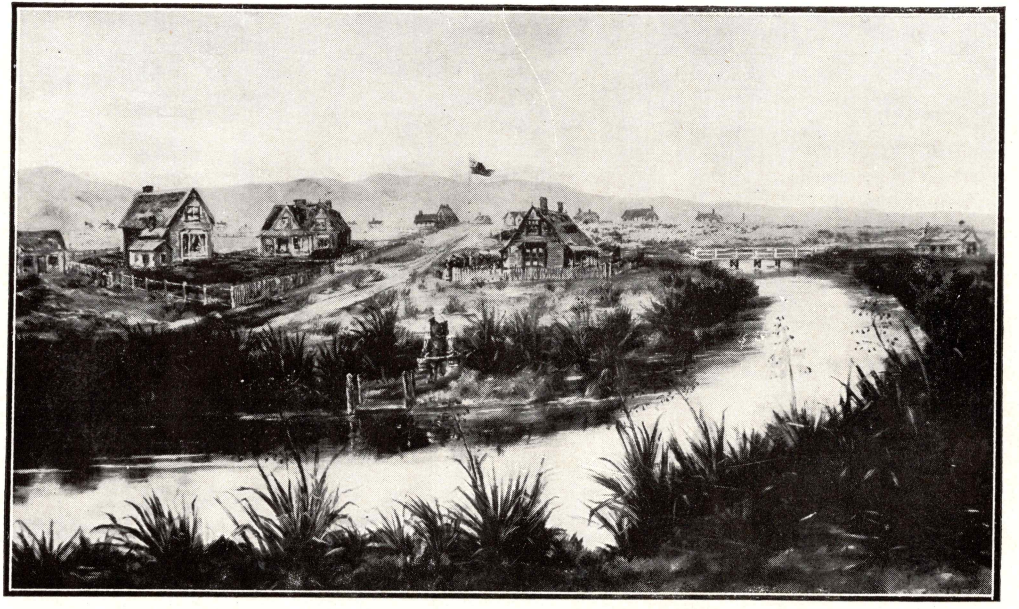
Historical Outline of the Province and the Provincial Buildings' Part Therein

THE Colony of New Zealand had been established some eight years when a band of Church of England adherents, inspired by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and led by John Robert Godley, arranged with the New Zealand Land Company to secure a tract of land in New Zealand for the purpose of a semi-ecclesiastical settlement under the supervision of the English Church. Colonisation had not as yet won a place of confidence in the view of English people, and it was still associated in their minds with convict settlements and a still-rankling War of Independence. Hence the response was not as hearty as might have been wished. However, the "hungry forties" in England were unhappy years and many were eager to leave them far behind to seek homes in a new land.

The choice was the Canterbury Plains, being portion of an area purchased by the New Zealand Company from the Maori Chiefs. The dealing was, unlike many with the Maoris, quite authentic, and the settlers were thus sure in their title, and had nothing to fear from warlike inhabitants, for there were few. The auguries were fair for a true test of the Wakefield System of Colonisation.

Despite scattered attempts at settlement about the same district, nothing so elaborate had been planned until this, so that by January of 1850 the first four ships—the *Randolph,* the *Charlotte Jane,* the *Sir George Seymour,* and the *Cressy* had reached Port Cooper, as Lyttelton was then known.

Captain Joseph Thomas had come there some two years earlier to do survey work and make necessary roads across the bare plains of tussock, and the marshy flats amid which the little tortuous Avon picked its way through the nigger-heads. Hence some preparation had been made for the immigrants, although for



An early view of the Avon near the site of the Provincial Council Buildings.

the first few months conditions were strenuous. But since the settlers were a well-chosen party, their progress was rapid and funds were not altogether lacking, as a certain financial qualification had been essential in the first place.

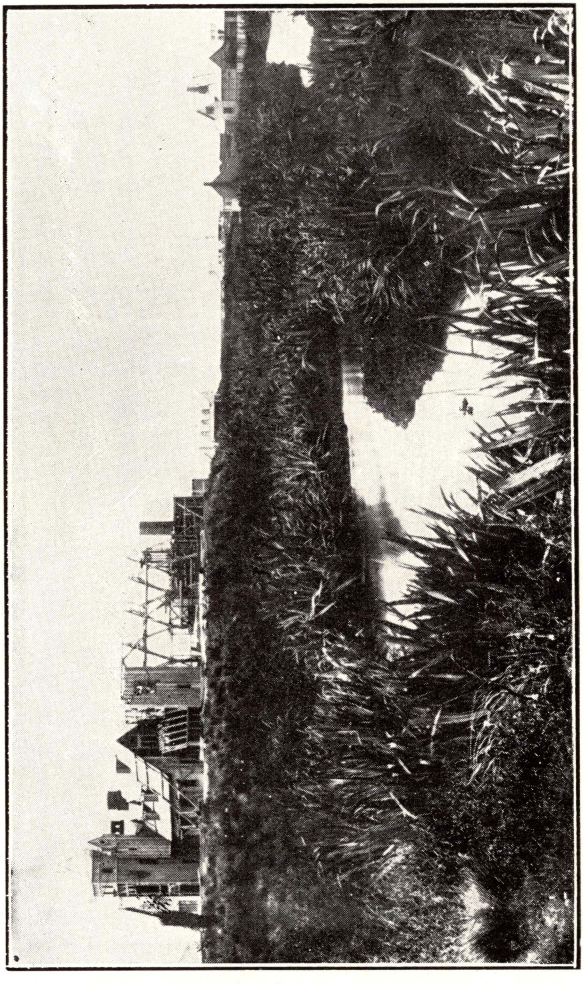
But space confines us to recording only the main issues of these early though interest-fraught years.

The year 1851 saw the charter granted to the Canterbury Association, but in 1852 a constitution was established enabling the district to function as a semi-autonomous province, responsible to the General Assembly at Auckland. Upon this the Canterbury Association transferred its lands to the Crown, and its affairs were administered by the Provincial Council, which first met on September 27th, 1853.

The opening session was held in a small house in Chester Street west, near the river, which had been the office of the short-lived "Guardian" newspaper. A description of this meeting had been left on record by Mr. Henry Sewell. "The externals are shabby in the extreme—a low, desolate looking wooden tenement, all by itself in a potato garden, a quarter of a mile at least from the inhabited part of the town, approached on an open trackless common covered with fern and tussock grass, barely passable in dry weather, and miserable in wet. The interior has been disguised neatly enough, but in a flimsy way, with canvas papered oak pattern, scarlet moreen covering the seats which are of iron hardness. A respectable, dignified chair for the Speaker such as ones sees in Masonic halls, a plain table, covered with papers, at which the clerk sits in front of the Speaker, with the English Statutes ranged imposingly in front, so as to give a Legislative look to the place. A side partition shuts off the public, and there is a small space at the end of the room for the Bar"—referring, of course, to the Press.

In 1857, the Council changed its quarters to a house in Oxford Terrace, previously occupied by Mr. W. G. Brittan. This house was afterwards converted into a hotel. Again, in 1858, the Council held a session in the then recently erected Town Hall, now (1950) the site of Messrs. Mackenzie's and other businesses on High Street.

The wooden structure as the official Government buildings was commenced in 1858, on January 6th. The foundation stone was laid on this date, and a brave function was made of it.



The Buildings in course of erection.

The building's shape was outlined by flag poles spaced about the grounds,* and the blaze of colour formed by pennons, streamers and flags, was a striking scene of gaiety in the young colony. A procession taking its course from St. Michael's Church after a service there, was composed of a number of the clergy, the Roll of Justices, and twenty-two members of the Provincial Council. The Superintendent was received at the building site by the Architects, Messrs. Mountfort and Luck, and conducted by them to the stone, the Latin inscription on which says:—

"On the feast of Epiphany in the year of Our Lord 1858 in the twenty-first year of Victoria, by the grace of God, Queen of Great Britain, William Sefton Moorhouse, Esquire, laid this stone in an edifice to be erected at the expense of the Province for the service of its Council and public offices. This and all our undertakings, may God direct and prosper."

The trowel and wooden mallet used in the ceremony cost £2 6s. and were purchased from the hardware store of Neeve in Colombo Street.

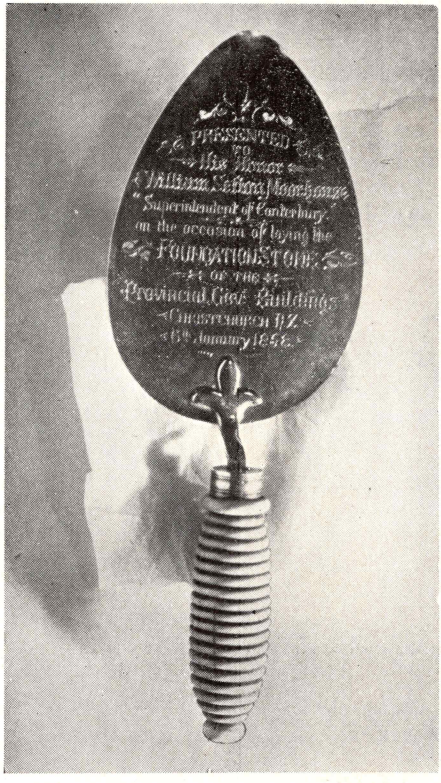
Frederick Jenkins's contract for the first portion of the structure was £5,243 9s. 2d. inclusive of extras, added to which the subcontract of Whincop, the well-known painter and glazier of the period, amounted to £262 0s. 4d., the total cost, including architects' fees and contingencies being £5,757 1s. 2d.

In May, 1859, a contract was entered into with Jenkins for the second portion of the block at a cost of £7,958 18s. and the total amount spent up to September 30th, 1861, was £13,715 19s. 2d.

The Council utilised this building for the first time on Thursday, September 29th, 1859. The Council room was, after 1876, for long used by the Land Board but after 1865, when the new stone mansion was completed it was used as the Provincial Council library.

It is a picturesque wooden apartment with a fine arched

* The land was originally reserved for a hospital, but being unsuitable, its purpose was altered.



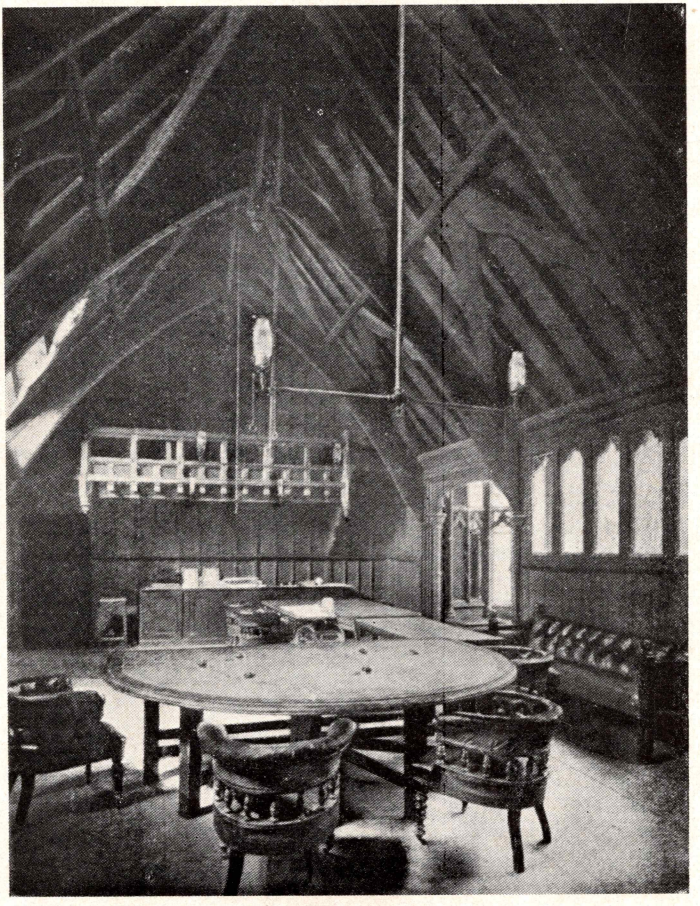
The trowel used by the Superintendent to lay the foundation stone is now in the possession of Mr. W. D. Ferguson of Wellington.

ceiling, panelled walls and a chastely ornamented public gallery and a reporters' gallery of similar design. The ceiling arches in panel form are a quaint departure, and the timber is interesting as being pit-sawn showing characteristic markings. The style is one with that of the low-arched passageways that thread the entire building, and holds an undoubted appeal. The view from the eastern bay window (oriel in type), with its fine tracery, is of peace and beauty in its glimpse of the Avon bordered by its grassy banks.

The original plan of the group of offices was departed from as the work went on. Some portions were altered, some left out and some added. One instance of this is the clock tower, which should have borne its timepiece beside the old wooden chamber, but as this project did not materialise, it was placed in High Street in the City, and the tower provided was pulled down to give place to the stone portion.

The first Council Chamber did not have the much admired bay window which it now includes, this being an additional work, carried out in February, 1860, the alteration involving an

expend'ture of no less than £274 3s. 6d., the work being executed by day labour plus 15 per cent commission to the contractor upon the prime cost. The carpenters' wages were 10/- a day, the masons' and bricklayers' 10/- a day, the labourers' 8/- a day, apprentices 5/- a day, plumbers 12/- a day, and plumbers' labourers 10/- a day. Fifty-six pounds of candles were used during the progress of the work connected with the bay window and other alterations done by candle light.

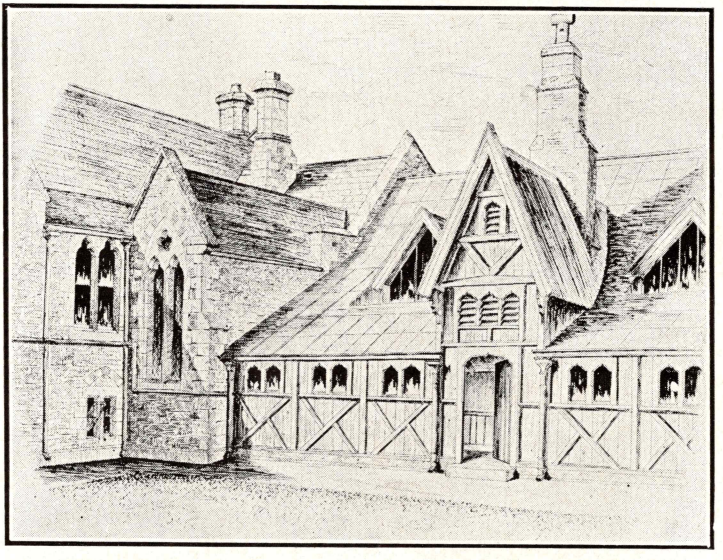


Before the construction of the stone Chamber, this well-designed room was used from 1859.

The stained glass windows supplied by Lavers and Barraud for these buildings cost £277 14s. and the tiling for the floors and walls £71 9s. 8d.

The furniture was supplied by Baldwin (afterwards Fuhrman) Colombo Street, and R. W. Walters of Whately Road, the internal fittings being from the joinery workshops of Buxton and Mansell.

Prosperity marked the course of affairs in the little community hereafter. In 1859 the Provincial finances appear in a



Within the Courtyard looking toward the Old Wooden Council Chamber, a sketch by Mr. J. G. Collins.

splendid state, for land was selling at a great rate. To aid the prosperity came the gold rush of 1861, to Gabriel's Gully in Otago. This meant immigration, and also a good market nearby for Canterbury's agricultural produce. West Coast gold discoveries in 1864 meant a similar advantage.

No wonder then that the Legislature felt justified in undertaking the tunnelling of the Port Hills in 1862, expensive as it was bound to be. In this same year the electric telegraph was

introduced. Civilisation was invading apace; the need for communications was realised, and the Great South Road was commenced in 1863, at practically the same time as the Ferrymead Railway, which was the first six miles of track in New Zealand.

In December 16th, 1864, the Cathedral's foundation stone was laid. This, too, was financed largely by the Province.

By 1865 the finest masterpiece of Mountfort, the Provincial Architect, was ready for use, complete except for some ornamental additions. The builders were Messrs. Forgan and Son, and Francis Lockyer was Clerk of Works. The cost was approximately £22,000 for this stone portion. Into this noble edifice the Council moved on November 21st, 1865.

It were perhaps appropriate here to say something of Mountfort, the architectural genius whose work we have examined.

From about 1820 till 1880 there extends the course of a remarkable development, the great Gothic Revival which found itself at variance with the earlier Neo-Classicism or Renaissance style made famous by Sir Christopher Wren and his followers.

Into the midst of this battle of the styles the architect for the Provincial Council Chambers, Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort,* was born in 1824. The battle was at its height in 1844 when as a young man of twenty he would be called upon to decide upon his profession and, having decided to be an architect, to determine to which camp he would give his adherence. In his early years and throughout his life he was an earnest churchman and would certainly have been strongly influenced by the ecclesiological movement, the earnest study of the long neglected Church Architecture and of Church Ritual, which began in the 'forties at Oxford and became therefore known as the Oxford Movement. Richard Carpenter, to whom young Mountfort was articled, was one of the early geniuses of the movement. He was the author of a valuable monograph on the Henry VII chapel at Westminster. Under such influence it can be well imagined how the enthusiasm of the earnest student would be fired by the news that an English Church settlement was to be founded in far-off New Zealand. What dreams he would have of carrying to the new land the architectural traditions of the old.

* Much of the information regarding the architect is drawn from an article by S. Hurst Seager in "The City Beautiful," 1926.

A view of the Buildings published in the "Illustrated London News" in the 'sixties.

Although a direct descendant from the ancient fighting stock of Simon de Montfort he himself was a recluse—a student of the history of the long line of his famous ancestors with which the history of England was inseparably bound up. Heraldry and the architectural forms associated with it became his favourite hobby. In 1848 he was preparing excellent designs for Church work in England, in the early type of Gothic—the 13th century—for which he retained his preference throughout his career, and which gave to his work an individuality and distinction easily recognised.

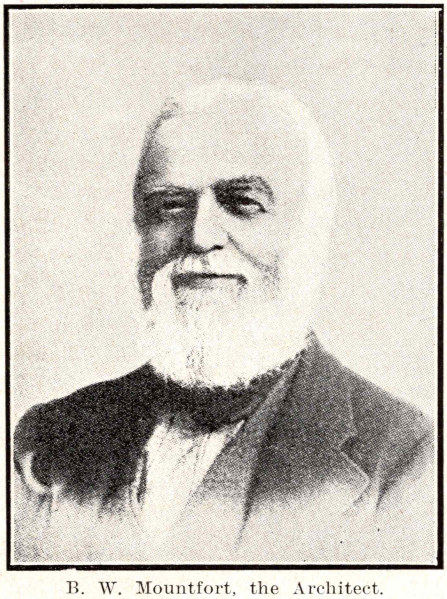
Two years later he sailed for Canterbury in the *Charlotte Jane* and would have been the first to land at Lyttelton had he not been pushed aside by the future Superintendent, Mr. Fitzgerald, who declared that he would not forego that honour.

Mountfort was for many years Provincial Architect, and was resident architect on the construction of Christchurch Cathedral, designed by Sir Gilbert Scott. Most of the churches and many of the public buildings about Christchurch were planned by Mountfort. Even his own home along Gloucester Street near Stanmore Road was of a simple type of Gothic in wood, and his simple offices in town showed the same taste.

In his personal appearance, he was of short stature, rather sturdy in build, of genial aspect and disposition, which has been described as lovable. Mr. Selwyn Bruce records that when walking, Mountfort "gave one the impression that he was tallying the number of yards from his home to his office."

His partner, Isaac Luck, while an able man, was quite the antithesis of Mountfort. He was loud-voiced, aggressive, truculent; a big man, rawboned and very tall. Mountfort was quietly spoken, unassuming, almost taciturn, yet of a winning, eager manner when his interest was aroused.

The tale is told that Mountfort one Sunday, when the good folk were taking the air in the afternoon sunshine, hurried along to Canterbury College with a book and papers hidden beneath his coat. He was intent upon his study yet diffident lest others should see his breach of the Sabbath—good churchman as he was. Imagine then, his horrified consternation when, before several groups of passers-by, there tumbled to the ground in confusion his pile of papers and book. But from this little picture of him one can perhaps conjure up a vision of the man and his character which can be correlated with the portrait given here.



B. W. Mountfort, the Architect.

Most of Mountfort's work still stands in splendid testimony. In his later years he was Canterbury College Architect, prior to his

death in 1898 at the age of 74 years. He was the author of several monographs on his favourite study, some of which are noted in the bibliography (p.61).

The rest of the history of the Provincial days is soon told, but first some note of the actors in the political and social sphere seems in keeping.

During the entire life of the Provincial Council there were four Superintendents:—

J. E. Fitzgerald		1853—1857
W. S. Moorehouse		1857—1863
	and	1866—1868
S. Bealey		1863—1866
W. Rolleston		1868—1876

All these were great men. Fitzgerald was a brilliant speaker, and rather an idealist, Moorehouse an enterprising man with a flair for finance. Bealey a capable, but matter-of-fact administrator, and Rolleston was perhaps the finest type of statesman of all. He was far-seeing, distinctly able, and a clear exponent of his views.

The members of the first Council were:—

W. Aylmer, Akaroa.
S. Bealey, City of Christchurch.
C. Bowen, Christchurch County.
T. Cass, City of Christchurch.
T. J. Cookson, Lyttelton.
C. E. Dampier, Lyttelton.
J. Hall, Christchurch County.
W. J. W. Hamilton, Lyttelton.
R. Packer, City of Christchurch.
R. H. Rhodes, Akaroa.
C. Simeon, Christchurch County.
H. G. Tancred, Christchurch County.

The Provincial political life is, as Sir Henry Wigram points out in his excellent book, well caught by William Pember Reeves in his clever poem *Ball in the Old Provincial Council Chamber:—*

Here is a corner. See the rout
Turning and twining in and out:
The dancers hold the floor.
Again that air my ear assaults
I'll wager now I've heard that waltz
Full fifty times before.

Youth will be served, so frolics gay
Dancing and junketing away
Where I in 'sixty-eight,
Filled with the awe debate inspires,
Beheld our grave Provincial sires
Discuss affairs of State.

There, where azalea's crimson glow
Gleams ruddy to the light below,
The Speaker took the chair—
Here Cabinets "those benches" graced,
Which sturdy Oppositions faced
In battle fierce and fair.

Here, Honest John with words of weight
Some "era" would "inaugurate"
Or policy unfold.
Retrenchment armed left Rolleston's head,
And Public Works were "spirited"
'Neath Sefton, super bold.

And there were crises in the fray
As witness the terrific day
Of "Chaos and Old Knight,"
When, amid wonder, fear, and fret,
The great Ten Minutes' Cabinet
Saw, and resigned, the light.

How small it all was—'tis confessed,
Policies, parties and the rest
Laugh an it pleases you.
Yet are we now, we numerous men,
Greater indeed, with tongue or pen,
Than they who were so few?

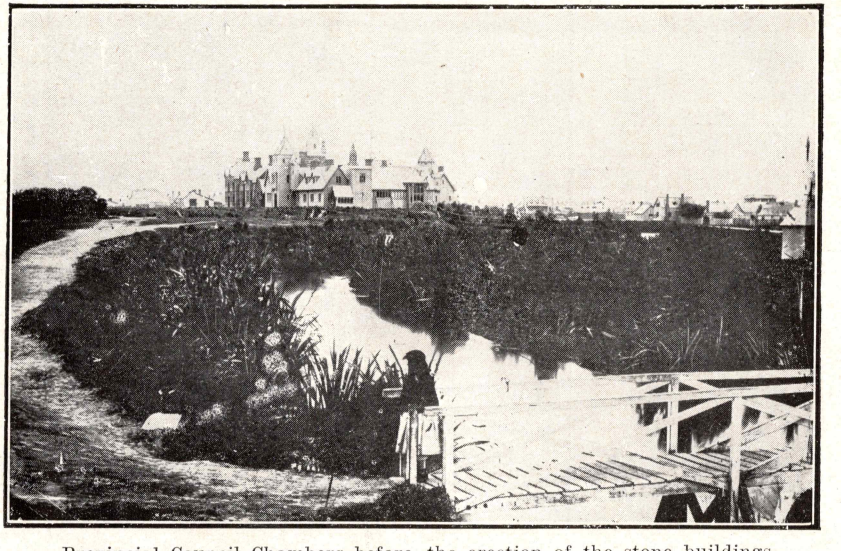
Think now when politicians preach
In many a many-columned speech
To readers scarcely awed;
Think of the frays where Moorhouse joked;
And Fitz's Irish ire provoked
The wit of Crosbie Ward.

When Christchurch loved the people's Bill,
Leaders bored nothing but the hill,
Who now bore all the land.
Were Sewell, Jollie, Wilson, Hall,
Montgomery and Tancred all
So poor, so weak a band?

They with the desert won the strife,
They sowed the seed of social life,
Whose stately tree we view.
Oh, flout them not in careless tones
Who laid our State's foundation stones,
And laid them deep and true.

Why must all things have their day?
And that so very brief a sway:
Yes, time will show the door
To all that's noble, all absurd,
To e'en this weary waltz I've heard
Full fifty times before.

—Colonial Couplets, 1889.



Provincial Council Chambers before the erection of the stone buildings.

Other electorates were given members as Canterbury and Westland grew in populace.

Population had increased with the gold rushes, and afterwards land became much in demand, and consequently scarce. Bad times followed, but these were slightly alleviated by such experiments as Rolleston's Village Settlement at Temuka, and by the demand for labour on the great South Railway.

Sir Julius Vogel, of the general Government, had borrowed large sums in England on behalf of New Zealand, and these funds, released in the country, eased the position for a time: but the cost of living of course became higher, conditions harder, and the Provincial Government, realising its imminent abolition in 1876, spent money too vigorously in Public Works.

[Green and Hahn, photo.

General view from north-west corner.

More borrowing in 1874 staved off depression for a time, the Councils were abolished; a boom—a temporary revival—came in 1878, then with the fall in wool prices (then the staple produce) in 1879, the province, together with the rest of New Zealand, entered upon the long downward grade of depression

that continued till the late nineties, after which, however, for many years New Zealand saw nothing but prosperity.

The latter-day history of the buildings has been uneventful. Many years ago, about 1906, the great balcony of Bellamy's which had earlier been used as a museum of sorts, was enclosed, converting it into spacious office accomodation. The Lands and Survey and the Lands and Deeds Departments for many years occupied the wooden portion, while the stone part has been used only on special occasions for great meetings and so following. Today the Department of Agriculture is the principal occupier.

Of late years interest has revived and improvements to the grounds have been made. In this connection, it is but right to pay due tribute to the work of the Beautifying Society, and especially to Mr. R. B. Owen, one of the most indefatigable workers in the city's interest. To Mr. Owen is the city indebted for the neat rock garden surrounding the building on the thoroughfare. Its bright array of flowers and verdant lawns form a graceful setting for the old mansions.

In appreciation of the Society's interest, the Public Works Department for a number of years accorded a subsidy for their attention to the surroundings.

This Department, which until 1927 administered the buildings, about 1925 contemplated completing the entire block in stone, in the style and following the intention of the original plan. But it was realised that the wooden section would endure longer, and its sentimental appeal was sufficient to defer the project.

In 1928 a Provincial Buildings Board, consisting of the Minister of Lands and members of the legislature representing the districts of Canterbury and Westland, was set up by the Government, and the entire block handed over to the control of this Board in trust for the Provinces of Westland and Canterbury. The first members of the advisory committee for this body were:—Sir Heaton Rhodes, chairman, Hon. J. Barr, Messrs. E. J. Howard, M.P., R. W. Hawke, M.P., H. Holland, M.P., H. R. Robinson (Secretary), and S. Roberts (Treasurer).

The present personnel is as follows:—

Messrs. R. M. Macfarlane, M.P. (Chairman); J. T. Watts, M.P.; J. Mathison, M.P.; J. K. McAlpine, M.P. Their appointments date from 14 September, 1949.

CONCLUSION

IN bringing this little essay to a close, I feel that much has been left unsaid, but realise, too, that most of my readers will not wish to undertake a study when they take up this little book. Hence if it serves its purpose in illuminating some of the uncertain aspects of the architecture of the Buildings, its purpose will be fulfilled.

However, it is hoped, too, that their true worth may become apparent to the people of Canterbury as a whole, and thus there may be amassed a weight of public opinion that will lead to the preservation and restoration of this historic pile.

But whatever its immediate fate, we cannot but realise that just as in a dimmer age the stately castles and cathedrals of England have decayed and fallen to ruin, leaving only the most rugged of the Gothic stonework to bear in stalwart perversity the ravage of the elements, so too, in time the old Provincial Buildings must, though after centuries of care and restoration, suffer the invading hand of time. When the quaintly wrought woodwork has weakened with age, and the darkened limestone has crumbled beside the grassy slopes; when no longer in vain the speeding north-west wind presses his blast upon towering buttress and smooth-worn, dark-blue rock, moss-grown, or mould dank; then, perchance, though enduring relic may not survive to stay for ever a memorial for the people of that day, yet surely the foundations of the province may still so endow their life that they will wish to recall with gratefulness the labours of the pioneers whose hands had set their land so fairly on its course, and, as tribute to their natures and their aspirations, had raised to house their far-seeing counsels the grand old Provincial Buildings in the noble Gothic Style.

THE END.

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